

NEW YORK TIMES
19 December 1984

Shuttle Can't Be Kept Fully Secret But Aides Say It Is Worth the Try

By RICHARD HALLORAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18 — Defense Department officials, elaborating on a newly announced policy of secrecy surrounding the space shuttle when it carries military cargo, acknowledged today that little information would be kept from the Russians, but said even that was worth the try.

"Space is a big place," one official said. "The less they know, the harder it will be for them to find us out there."

Another official said, "It will keep them off balance — we want to mess with their minds."

Brig. Gen. Richard F. Abel, chief of public affairs for the Air Force, announced the policy yesterday, saying that information on space shuttle flights dedicated to Defense Department missions would be strictly controlled. "We intend to protect the identity, mission and all operational details of D.O.D. payloads," he said.

An open flow of information has been customary since the beginning of the manned space program, but officials said the Air Force had kept secret most of the operational details about space vehicles when they were launched atop unmanned rockets and was merely transferring that policy to cover military operations of the shuttle.

There is constant sparring between the two superpowers, much of it symbolic, over their military and intelligence operations in space. Some space flight experts said today that the measures announced Monday, in addition to being another round in that sparring, could be laying the groundwork for even greater secrecy in the future. [Page B6.]

Military to Use Shuttle

Over the next three years, almost all American military space missions are to be shifted from unmanned rockets to the space shuttle. Air Force officials said 8 to 10 military shuttle missions would be launched each year once the program was fully under way. Defense Department officials have told Congressional committees that military missions would eventually account for

about 30 percent of the space shuttle flights.

The first flight under the policy of secrecy is scheduled for Jan. 23, General Abel said, with liftoff from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida set for somewhere from 1:15 to 4:15 P.M.

In line with the policy, the nature of the military cargo aboard that flight was not identified. But Congressional testimony in May by Robert S. Cooper, director of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, suggested that it might be part of a project code-named Teal Ruby.

"Teal Ruby," he said, "is a space-based experiment to evaluate infrared surveillance for the detection of aircraft targets against the earth's clutter background."

He said that Teal Ruby would also "develop a comprehensive and global radiometric background data base and space-qualify first-generation advanced infrared surveillance technology." By this he appeared to mean accumulating information about radio waves and adapting advanced devices for sensing and tracking missiles and other objects in space. Mr. Cooper said that Teal Ruby was "scheduled for shuttle launch and will operate in space for a minimum of one year."

In that Congressional testimony, Mr. Cooper said the space shuttle would also carry satellites to generate power for communications satellites that will have both military and commercial uses. The nuclear power would also serve high-powered radar satellites and a space station that will need power for manufacturing, he said. And the spacecraft will carry the communications, radar, infrared, ocean surveillance, navigation and weather satellites that comprise the vast and growing network of military surveillance in the sky. Some are dedicated to the detection of nuclear explosions around the globe.

Beginning next October, most of the launchings of the space shuttle with military payloads will be from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, officials said. That will allow the shuttle, which will be launched to the south over the huge expanse of the Pacific Ocean, to go into the polar orbit required for many military missions, they said.

Vandenberg Air Force Base, on the coast between Los Angeles and San Francisco, has been the launching pad for most test firings of intercontinental ballistic missiles aimed across the Pacific toward the island of Kwajalein. It can be closed off to the press and the public more easily than the space center at Cape Canaveral, the officials said.

Some officials acknowledged privately, however, that Russian trawlers crammed with electronic devices and high-powered telescopes regularly patrol the ocean just outside the three-mile limit within sight of Cape Canaveral and of Vandenberg.

In addition, they said, the Soviet Union has satellites that can photograph missile and shuttle shots and satellites with heat-seeking sensors that can tell within seconds when a missile or space shot has taken place. Radar and other sensors then pick up those shots and track them through space.

With all that, the officials acknowledged, the Russians would be able to know when a space shuttle had been launched, to track it and to monitor its activities in space. "You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes," said an official, "to tell when we're going to launch a space shot."

"But," another official asserted, "we're going to make them have to look harder."

In addition, officials said, forcing the Soviet Union to be active in seeking to detect United States space activities would give American intelligence, in the never-ending game of cat and mouse, an opportunity to test Soviet reactions and abilities for surveillance.

When the United States fires ballistic missiles, it is required under an agreement with the Soviet Union to notify Moscow of the test 24 hours ahead of time so that Soviet missile crews, seeing the shot on their detectors, will know that it is a test and not a live shot.

Air Force officials were unable to say whether notice to Moscow of a space shuttle launching would be required.

Defense Department officials said the announcement of the new policy had been made this week because the first military space shuttle had long been planned for next month. In response to reporters' questions, they

denied that the Reagan Administration was using the announcement to put pressure on the Soviet Union in discussions over arms control scheduled to begin in Geneva next month.

CONTINUED

Soviet Criticism of Move

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, Dec. 18 — The official Soviet press agency Tass today described the shuttle security measures as "an impenetrable veil of secrecy" designed to hide a military takeover of the entire program.

But the report itself, in little more than 300 words, disclosed more information about the military aspects of the American space program than the Soviet press has ever disclosed about its own Government's military uses of space.

Although Western analysts say the Soviet space program is largely controlled by the military, the Soviet Union has never acknowledged any military aspect to any of its space flights.

In an indignant tone, Tass said spokesmen from the Pentagon and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration "flatly refused" to disclose the shuttle's flight plan or the duration of its mission. It said journalists would "for the first time" be denied access to conversations between the craft and ground control.

A far more extreme information blackout than this is standard procedure for Soviet space flights. Apart from rare exceptions involving international crews, the flights are not announced in advance, and journalists are barred from the space center at Baikonur, in Soviet Central Asia.

Flight plans and schedules are not announced, and officials decline even to tell foreign reporters whether newly launched flights will be long or short. Asked about the goals of highly publicized flights in progress, officials generally say no more than that they are carrying out scientific research.

Fragmented reports in technical language about individual experiments in biology, metallurgy or optics frequently refer to the flights' "contribution to the national economy" and appear aimed both at depicting them as peaceful in nature and at justifying their expense.